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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001713

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: GNP CHAIRWOMAN IN STABLE CONDITION AFTER ATTACK

REF: SEOUL 1642

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark C. Minton.
Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Main opposition Grand National Party (GNP) Chairwoman and likely party contender for the 2007 presidential race Park Geun-hye was attacked May 20 in Seoul by an assailant with a box-cutter; she suffered deep cuts to her face. While she is expected to make a fast recovery, she will be hospitalized at least through the end of the week. Post recommends the Secretary consider sending Chairwoman Park a sympathy note; see paragraph eight. END SUMMARY.

CHAIRWOMAN IN STABLE CONDITION

¶2. (SBU) As Chairwoman Park Geun-hye was about to walk onto a makeshift podium to campaign on behalf of the GNP seoul mayoral candidate, a man, who appeared to be requesting a handshake, slashed her face with a box-cutter. Yonsei University Hospital officials stated the Chairwoman is in stable condition. Park suffered an eleven-centimeter-long (about four inches) cut to her face, from ear to jaw, one-to-three centimeters deep, and required 60 stitches. The cut damaged Park's salivary glands and jaw muscles. It will take at least two weeks for her to speak without difficulty, hospital officials said, and months to fully recover. The cut narrowly missed her carotid artery and jugular vein, which could have been fatal.

¶3. (SBU) GNP members told us that Park was a very strong woman and wanted to leave the hospital to get back on the campaign trail. She will remain at the hospital, however, at least through the end of the week. Doctors anticipate that a complete recovery would take months. (NOTE: Park is the daughter of former President Park Chung-hee, who had two assassination attempts made on him. The first, in August 1974, took the life of Park Geun-hye's mother, Yook Young-soo; the second, in October 1979, killed President Park. END NOTE.)

THE ASSAILANTS

¶4. (SBU) GNP officials grabbed the attacker, identified by his family name Ji, and turned him over to the police.

According to the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency, the 50-year-old suspect was previously convicted eight times for violent crimes, served a combined jail term of over 14 years, and was released August 2005 from Cheongsong Prison. According to police interrogators, Ji said he assaulted the GNP leader "out of frustration and dissatisfaction with society and democracy." Another man, identified as Park, was also placed in custody after he hit Chairwoman Park in the face and was caught shouting and throwing chairs and microphones at the crowd after Ji's attack. Fifty-four-year-old Park was found to be a member of the ruling Uri Party. The party has since revoked his membership. Both suspects were earlier believed to be drunk, but tests showed that only Park was intoxicated.

15. (C) Korean police told Embassy RSO they have searched both men's residences and seized their computers. They are investigating whether there is any connection between the two men and still determining if there are "conspirators" in the attack. So far, there appears no link between the two arrested men. Ji was found with a cell phone purchased in April worth over USD 700. Twenty-six names were found in the cell phone's address book, twenty-three name were called on a regular basis, and three names were called extensively. Ji purchased the box cutter he used to attack Park that afternoon at a stationary store near the site of the attack. Seoul mayoral candidates Oh Se-hoon (GNP) and Kang Kum-sill (Uri) have both requested police protection. The police will provide six police officers to each of the political parties and the parties will determine how they will utilize the extra protection.

UNIVERSAL CONDEMNATION

16. (SBU) President Roh Moo-hyun said that such violence was unacceptable in the election process of a democratic society and called for a thorough investigation. President Roh ordered the prosecution and police to set up a joint investigation team headed by Lee Seung-gu, director of the Seoul Western District Prosecution's Office. The team has five prosecutors and 35 policemen. All the political parties have roundly condemned the attack, calling it an act of terrorism against one of the country's top politicians. They also called for stern punishment against those involved in the attack.

POLITICAL IMPACT

17. (SBU) With the May 31 local elections days away, the attack will likely galvanize the country's conservative forces and could sway votes in the GNP's favor in closely contested electorates such as Daejeon and Jeju, according to election experts. Even before the incident, the GNP was predicted to win 11 of the 16 major contests up for grabs, including Seoul, Gyeonggi Province, Busan, Daegu, and the Gyeongsang provinces (reftel). Park was reported to have told her aides not to change any of the GNP's campaign plans as she was moved into the operating room. A leading contender for the GNP nomination for next year's presidential race, the attack could also give Park sympathy votes to win the party's nomination.

ACTION RECOMMENDED

18. (SBU) The Ambassador has already sent a sympathy note and flowers to Park. Post suggests that the Secretary convey a message as well. We recommend the following text:

BEGIN TEXT:

Dear Chairwoman Park,

I was deeply saddened to learn that you were attacked and injured on May 20 during a campaign event. While I was relieved to learned that the prognosis for your full recovery is good, I am profoundly troubled by this savage event. As you must know more than anyone else, the politics of violence

should have no place in the Republic of Korea or anywhere
else. Please accept my sincere wish for a speedy recovery.
END TEXT.
VERSHBOW